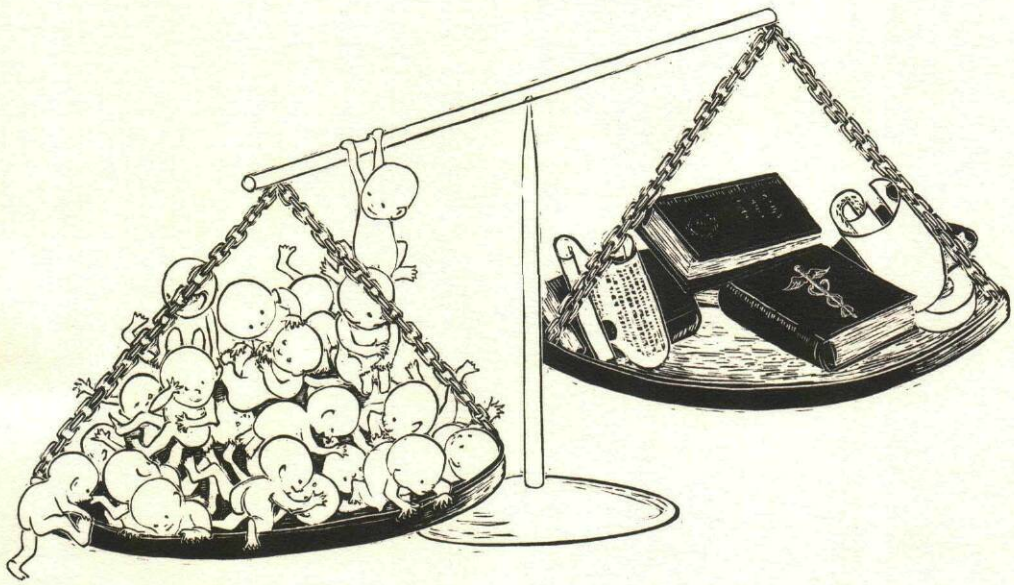
Winter 1996 ◆ Number 6

The Women's Quarterly



The Fetus Beat Us

Candace C. Crandall explains why the pro-choice movement is suddenly playing defense

Over the past six months, the morale of the pro-choice side of the abortion stalemate has visibly collapsed. *Roe v. Wade* remains the law of the land, and 1.5 million abortions continue to be performed every year. But defenders of the right to an abortion — once so supremely self-confident — now express unprecedented doubts and misgivings about their cause.

In October, Norma McCorvey — the "Jane Roe" in *Roe v. Wade* — dramatically defected from the pro-abortion camp, overcome with guilt, she said, at the sight of empty swings in a playground. That same month glitter feminist Naomi Wolf published an anguished piece in the *New Republic,* warning abortion-rights supporters that they stood in danger of becoming "callous, selfish, and casually destructive men and women who share a cheapened view of human life." Only a few weeks before, the *Atlantic Monthly* had published an appeal to liberals by Professor George McKenna of New York's City College, urging them to recognize abortion as perhaps necessary, but certainly evil.

Two politicians who ventured into the 1996 race in the confidence that their records on abortion would win over the pro-choice majority alleged to lurk inside the Republican party — Governor Pete Wilson of California and Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania — ignominiously backed out. The Republican presidential nominee in 1996 will again be pro-life, as he has in every year since 1980.

The Congress, which battled only three years ago to junk the Hyde Amendment prohibiting federal funding of abortion, has likewise become inhospitable to abortion. Abortion opponents were permitted to display gruesome drawings during the fierce November debate over banning partial-birth abortions. Dozens of pro-

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Drawing by Jan Thornhill

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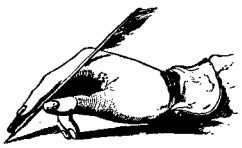
Diary



Cinderella as Role Model

LIKE MOST MOTHERS of small girls, I was eagerly made aware when Disney's *Cinderella* was "coming to home video." I was reminded over and over that it would be my "once in a lifetime chance" to purchase this "timeless classic." And of course I did, the very day it arrived in our local video store. I've since had the opportunity to view *Cinderella* maybe three hundred times. And again, like most mothers of small girls, each time I've hit the play button I've wondered: Should I be letting my daughter watch this stuff?

For of course Cinderella is the archetypical feminist villain — and maybe never so perfectly villainous as in the Disney animators' vision of her: shapely, winsome, dreamily unselfconscious that her hope to be rescued by a handsome prince will send a generation of feminist theorists into turgid condemnations of her. My daughter, too, is dreamily unselfconscious. She sighs as Cinderella waves farewell from the royal wedding coach (and sadly wonders afterwards what sort of "progress" replaced carriages with minivans and ballgowns with miniskirts). And I have to admit, as I watch Cinderella go about her chores good-naturedly, I'd rather my daughter absorbed her example than that of, say, the characters on "Sesame Street," who appear to regard trash recycling as the supreme human virtue.

I also prefer Cinderella to the contemporary, supposedly more "enlightened" Disney heroines — the Little Mermaid, Belle, and Pocahontas. For there is another side to Cinderella overlooked in the pursuit of edifying feminist role models. Despite her treacly moments, Cinderella displayed truly admirable traits: cheerfulness in adversity, pluckiness in standing up to her malevolent step-family, modesty, resourcefulness, and a determination to dream of a better life despite her seemingly hopeless situation. The traits that unite the current crop of Disney heroines are their colossal vanity and self-absorption — whether it's the tarty mermaid mouthing off to her father, or Belle sneering at the provincialism of her neighbors, or Pocahontas exclaiming that she'd rather go it alone than suffer the indignity of a "handsome, sturdy husband" building "sturdy walls" around her.

CINDERELLA, ON THE other hand, was a heroine of the old school. These heroines didn't only populate Disney cartoons, of course. They were everywhere — played by actresses like Olivia de Havilland and Katharine Hepburn in the great Hollywood movies; or striding through, of all places, nineteenth-century novels. Is there a greater heroine in literature than Jane Austen's Elizabeth Bennett? Who could be more fierce-minded and independent than she? What modern-day female character is more determined not to be simpering or foolish, a mere object, nor to resign her fate to the hands of an unworthy man?

These sorts of heroines no longer exist because today popular heroines must also, by and large, accept the tenets of feminism. Independence and self-expression are to be prized to the exclusion of everything else; marriage is a state to fall into (if at all) as if by accident, and should never be any woman's overriding goal or ambition. The more cardboard feminist heroines remind me of the proletarian heroes of old Soviet boy-meets-tractor novels: their personalities reflect a set of political ideas rather than real life conflicts and passions. Pocahontas' aspiration to perfect independence is as crudely stereotypical and idealized as Cinderella's rescue by a prince.

THE TRUE HEROINE did not shun romance or marriage, nor did she compromise herself in it: she chose her husband wisely and with the knowledge that the egotism of youth must eventually yield to the responsibilities of adulthood; she understood that those responsibilities, while compromising in superficial respects, were the substance of a full existence. Perhaps Cinderella is naive to dream of a happy, romantic ending with her prince; on the other hand — to paraphrase, badly, the Jewish philosopher Abraham Heschel — at least her glass-slippered feet are pointed in the right direction. Yes, of course, hers is an innocent view to take of marriage today. What about divorce, what about single motherhood, etc., etc.? Cinderella might also be hit by a runaway carriage; she might die in childbirth; she might be assassinated by anti-monarchist revolutionaries; Prince Charming might turn out to be Prince Charles. But at least she is expecting to get married, and at least she is — going into it — expecting a happy experience.

If my own little girl — who insists upon falling asleep at night wearing a pink Cinderella ribbon tied around her neck — grows up with the same optimism about marriage, I'll feel very gratified. I certainly don't worry about her independence. She is brave, clever, and good-hearted, but I'm afraid she identifies rather too strongly with the autocratic side of princesses: I sometimes wonder if she could do with a little less self-esteem. It is thus my daughter's future prince, whoever he may be, for whom I will save my sympathy.

– Danielle Crittenden

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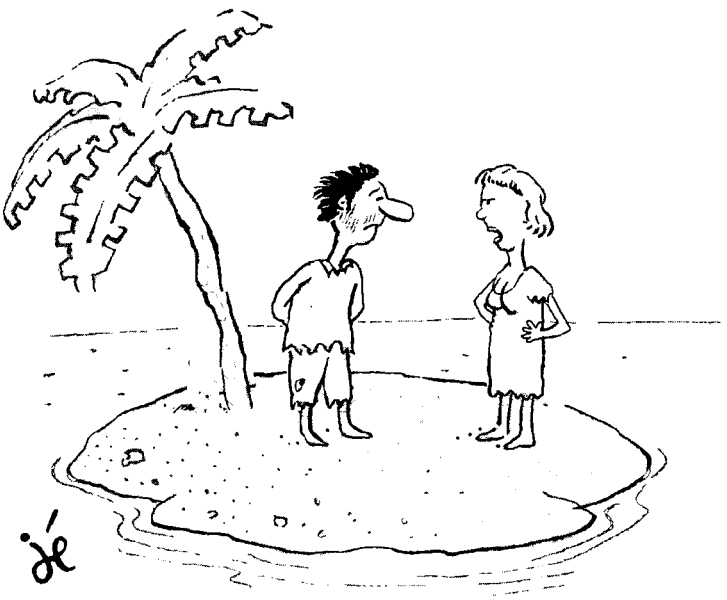

"Clichés! Clichés! That's all I ever hear from you!"

Cartoon by Charles Jaffé

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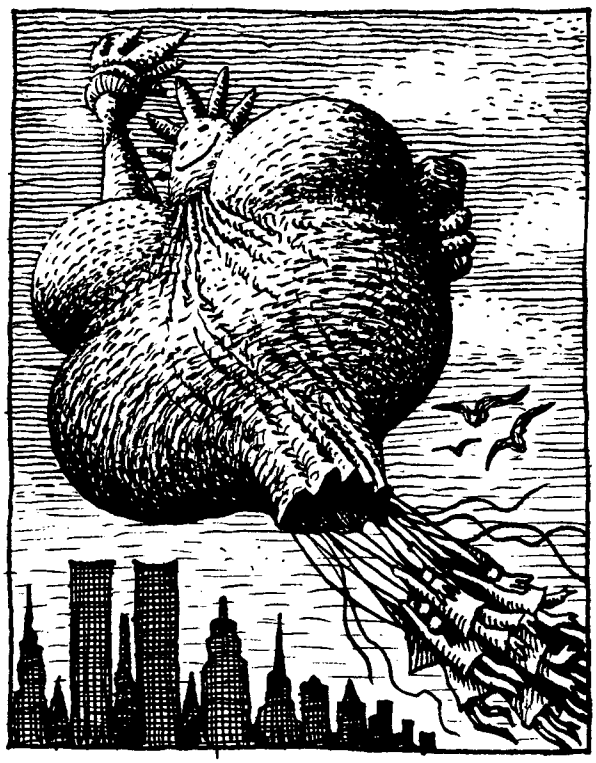
You're On Your Own, Baby

Midge Decter argues that the woman problem arises not from lack of freedom but because of it

When Sigmund Freud first asked his now tiresomely famous question — What does woman want? — it is hard not to believe that there was a certain amount of unscientific irritation in it. But even Freud could not have dreamed that by the second half of the twentieth century, the whole of American society — its men and women, its thinkers, its journalists, its artists, its educators, its religious leaders, its entertainers, its doctors, its policy-makers and politicians, its Freudians and its anti-Freudians — would be agitated by the issue of how women feel, what they feel, and what is bothering them.



The first thing to be said is that however one defines that issue, the so-called women's movement has failed to speak to it. I say so-called because from the very first, feminist groups have neither concerned themselves with nor spoken for the vast majority of their constituency. We might linger for hours over the problem of how and why there should have been an explosion of angry demand on the part of women who as a group were the freest, healthiest, wealthiest, longest-lived, and most comfortably situated people the world had yet laid eyes upon. Let's just say that the world's most fortunate people — among them, most visibly, educated young American women — were at some point mysteriously seized with a paroxysm of cosmic greed. However good it was, life was not good enough for them. Like the writer who, blessed with praise, adulation, best-sellerdom, and all the coveted prizes, yet grows bitter at not having been declared equal to Shakespeare, a certain sector of the American upper-middle class began to bray to the moon that it had not, like God, achieved perfection.

Having said all this, however, I hasten to point out that there is a troubling and difficult condition in the life of the contemporary American woman. Or to put the matter more precisely, in the life of contemporary American men and women. For it is impossible, and should be impossible, to speak of one without the other. Life on earth is what men and women share together. They may have different interests, and they do; they may need to keep secrets from one another, and they do; they may in some sense be locked in combat, and they are. But the operative word here is locked. What touches one, profoundly affects the other. So women, and through them men, are suffering from — though are also blessed by — a certain new difficulty.

Modern enlightened woman has been caught in the toils of a truly revolutionary social change — and with her, her husband, sons, and lovers. The women's movement was itself no doubt a kind of secondary symptom of this new condition, a kind of momentary blip on the radar screen of modern woman's wanderings into uncharted territory. This revolution is the accession into her life of an entirely new degree of, and a new kind of, freedom. Indeed, she has become free in a way and to an extent that her husband has not.

It is a freedom that frightens her and disorients her and burdens her ter-

Cartoon by Yuri Kolyadenko

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ribly, whether she is conscious of being burdened or not. As well it should. The appeal to her of the women's movement is that in her fear and disorientation, the movement offers her the momentary escape contained in the idea that she is not free at all; that she is, on the contrary, the victim of an age-old conspiracy that everything troubling to her has been imposed on her by others.

What is this new freedom? Put in the starkest terms, it is the fateful and as yet not fully fathomed separation of sex and procreation. The revolution in women's lives — that which separates the woman of 1995 from the woman of 1895 far more decisively than the woman of 1895 can be separated from the woman, say, of 1495 — is that which has been wrought by the near perfection of contraception. (And now added to effective birth control technology is medically safe and even socially approved abortion. Should the pill for some reason fail, she has a second chance to undo conception.)

It is impossible to overestimate the impact of this medical technology. Effective contraception has put woman at a distance from nature, her nature, and extended the domain of her own individual will in a way that has altered all her relations to life — to children foremost, but also to men and to herself. Safe contraception has made possible her pursuit of a career — a new freedom barely, as yet, assimilated. It has extended her life and improved her health to the point where she might look forward to the likelihood of being a robust widow. It has afforded her the possibility of having sexual relations without consequence and thus outside of marriage. Finally, the most obvious and most significant of the practical effects of safe birth control has been that which goes by the name of family planning: babies may be timed for convenience.

A woman must now decide everything essential to her. Whether to be serious about work or not — a decision which does not afflict any but the richest of men and which afflicts many of them with alcoholism and other forms of despair. Whether to sleep with this man or that man or none — again, a decision which afflicts few men in relation to women, for sexual revolution or no sexual revolution, few men can even now count themselves on the choosing end of this particular transaction. Whether to marry (a question which once offered her only the alternative of a pinched and barren spinsterhood) and whom to marry and when to marry — a form of freedom heretofore enjoyed, or possibly not enjoyed, only by men. Concomitant with this last freedom has come the freedom to divorce — if she thinks she ought to or even if she merely wants to.

In short, a woman must make up her mind in every major area of her life about what to do, whether to do, and how to be. Thus with the exception of unhappy accidents or unavoidable misfortunes, her satisfaction and contentment are in her own hands — to a degree possibly unprecedented in the history of mankind, a degree experienced by her as bordering on the intolerable. The question "What does woman want?" has become for her the question "What do I want?" It is a question none of us has the spiritual wherewithal to answer on one's own. Yet on her own is what the modern enlightened woman now is.

Nowhere is this more the case than with motherhood. The baby now born because it was "wanted," and equally the baby foregone because it was "not wanted," are offspring of a different kind from those borne by our grandmothers. As a mother today, a woman is no longer merely responsible for her children's care, she is responsible for the very fact of their existence, or nonexistence.

Thus, delivered of a new baby, an enlightened woman feels that she must see the baby is not only fed, sheltered, and instructed, but that its life, which she chose, is happy and meaningful. She must not only be a good mother, she must be a successful mother; and the child must reflect the rightness of her choice to have had him, and her worthiness to have made that choice. No wonder modern mothers watch every signal of their children's development so closely, read so many books purporting to unravel the mysteries of their bodies and psyches, and require such a great deal of professional advice about them. Children have become a career — a career in which mothers either succeed or fail.

Once not so very long ago a baby would simply have happened to a mother, like the rainfall. As an event of nature, he would have seemed to her inevitable, something to live with, something to make the best of, and perhaps, God willing, to be a sometime source of pleasure and satisfaction. Now, as an act of her will, the baby is an entirely new kind of burden.

This is one of the real reasons that modern motherhood stands in conflict with career. Not because work arrangements have been created to disadvan-

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tage women. Not because our society provides inadequate day care. But because the level and quality of professional commitment and demand for both career and motherhood are now very much the same. Young career women, when they have babies, are discovering that they do not wish to give as much of their time or themselves to the office as the successful pursuit of career entails. No doubt to their own surprise, it is motherhood that now engages some considerable part of their professional energy and aspirations. That other kind of working mother, who works at routine tasks and does so only for the money, may be just as tired at the end of the day but her spirit has not been divided; the children have always come first in her mental and emotional priorities.

Thus a woman's entire life — love, sex, marriage, and above all motherhood — has become entangled in personal ambition. Her very existence is a career. Am I then arguing against this new freedom? Suggesting that we must somehow turn back the clock on the revolution in the life of women wrought by twentieth-century technology? No indeed, I am not. Even if I were, what good would it do? Freedom is after all a blessing. And this particular freedom is an incomparable blessing.

Two hundred years ago I, a woman in her late sixties with grown children and grandchildren, might easily have been dead by now. Certainly I would have been old, possibly bent, very likely toothless, and worn away by toil and childbirth. In many respects my life would have been far, far less rich. In order to enjoy as I do the presence of four surviving healthy children and ten healthy and beautiful grandchildren, I might have had to endure the burial of at least an equal number. Could I be so ungrateful as to stand here today, in good health, enjoying a life of comfort and ease, heedlessly preaching reaction?

Nevertheless, we must understand something about freedom. This is an understanding that has been almost totally eclipsed in our time, when the word freedom is on everyone's lips and the actual nature of freedom has fled from our minds. Freedom is not happiness. It is an end in itself; its value is itself. It cannot make you content, rich, or beautiful. It can only make you free. Being free means being your own boss, taking your own destiny, to the extent humanly possible, into your own hands. It is difficult, sometimes frightening, and fraught with responsibility. In fact, the real meaning of the women's movement has been a flight, precisely, from women's new freedom — their sexual freedom, their procreative freedom, and, in the end, ironically, their social freedom. Every woman a doctor, lawyer, or — my favorite of all the movement's angry demands for strict equality with men — a coal miner, every woman doing everything that men do, is not freedom, only a redefinition of externally imposed limits. If once you were supposed to be a nice girl, now you are supposed to be a full partner in five years — or a fireman.

But if freedom is hard spiritual work, it is also energizing, inspiriting, and healing. Just as we almost never hear from the feminist ideologues about the sheer pleasures involved in looking after babies — is there anyone more intoxicated, more besotted, than the mother of a fifteen-month-old? — so in truth we never hear any genuine celebration of women any more. The ordinary young woman of today — she who goes about her life as a free person, trying to be a responsible wife, a mother, a friend, a citizen, keeping herself vital and attractive — is a praiseworthy being. Bella Abzug, Gloria Steinem, and Betty Friedan may have preferred all these years to regard her as an object of pity, a victim, but she is precisely not a victim — of anything, that is, but bad social theory.

No one, I repeat, has ever led a life with so many private options in it as the modern enlightened woman. It is not surprising that she is often confused and restless and vulnerable to a lot of abstract notions about what she should be doing. It is not surprising that the family appears, for the moment, to be a highly unstable institution. The family will not in the end, I think, remain unstable for long. The nuclear family is the most useful invention of the human spirit, a means by which men and women and their children can negotiate a tolerable settlement of their respective, very different needs.

But how are we to get along in the meantime? We need desperately to understand what is truly going on with us and to be as honest about it as possible. A proper feminism would result in a movement that spoke to women not about their grievances but about their new condition of freedom. It would be saying to them not, "You are entitled to complain" but rather, "Your difficulty is also your opportunity. Be of high heart. You are going to make it." ◆

Midge Decter lives in New York City. This article is adapted from a speech she recently gave to the Independent Women's Forum.

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The Token Man

A Cad's Fear of Children

David Eddie owns up

When my girlfriend/future wife Pam turned thirty, she issued me an ultimatum: "Either agree now to fertilize my ovaries within the next three years, or pack your bags." I wasn't offended; I understood. Something happens to women when they hit that age: Nature takes over them, like a benign Beelzebub, starts to speak to them and through them, saying, "It's time. He'll do. Tonight, bury your diaphragm and make all his drinks doubles. But if he says no, you must find another."

But for me, it was a terrible, terrible decision. I love her; I want what she wants — but I never wanted kids. I've always been afraid kids would destroy me, both as a writer and as a human being. "There is no more somber threat to Art than the perambulator in the hallway," as someone once said (I'm sorry, I can't remember who — some Brit, obviously). I agree. To write, I've found, you need three things: 1) time, 2) peace and quiet, and 3) to be well-rested. You can drag yourself into a job in almost any condition, as I've demonstrated on numerous occasions, but writing's a bit like chess: you have to be in pretty fair shape to compete at the highest levels. All three go out the window when you have kids, it seems.

Then there's the external pressure to switch to a more lucrative profession. It's all very well to pursue your adolescent ideals of being a starving writer into your thirties, as I have, when you're childless. The world tends to view it as cute, quaint, part of your quixotic charm. But that quickly changes. Suddenly you're selfish, irresponsible, a cad. "Did you hear? Dave's having a kid and he's still working on his Great Novel!" "Oh, what a jerk!"

Because of my stay-at-home status as a writer, I'd probably wind up being the "primary caregiver," and may I say (without causing offense) that having kids looks like a nightmare from the outside. You're harried, exhausted, you can't go out, in some cases can't even *pop out* — you have to get a sitter just to meet someone for a cup of coffee. You're starved for adult society. All day long, you have to pretend to be interested in statements like: "Look, Mom, Dad, all the buttons on my shirt are in a row!" Let's face it: we don't bring them into the world for their conversation. Ten years of stating the obvious, followed by ten years of sullen silence, then a lifetime of cash requests.

Of course, if you ask parents whether they're glad they did it, they respond: "Oh, yes, we're thrilled, it's the best thing we ever did," etc. But I'm afraid when I have kids, they'll rip off their (metaphorical) rubber masks and say: "Ha! Got you! Welcome to Kiddie Hell! It's sort of like Disneyland, except you can *never leave!*"

"But, you said —"

"Yes, well, sorry about that, Dave. We had to do that to get you to take that fatal, irrevocable plunge. If it's any consolation, you can wreak your revenge by roping in other gullible bachelors. We have meetings where we explain all about it on Saturday mornings at seven, when all those lucky, lucky bachelors are still asleep."

Would I be able to handle the hassle? I mean, I've never even been much good with plants or pets. People ask me to take care of their precious ferns while they go away; they invariably return to withered stumps and dried-out stalks. I've had three pets: a canary and two finches, and all three died within weeks. The canary died by misadventure (I was chasing it around the apartment, trying to get it back into its cage, when it flew behind the bookcase and was squished); one of the finches committed suicide (I came home and found it up in its cage, with its head jammed in its feed bucket); and I cold-bloodedly murdered the other one, setting it free off my balcony to take its chances on the mean streets of the city. Why? Finches make this unk-unk, unk-unk sound all day long; it was driving me crazy.

So what kind of father would I make? Pam assures me (Nature tells her) I would make a good one. I'd enjoy it and still be able to write — maybe better than ever. And, the thing is, she's almost always right. Whenever we disagree, I've noticed, I might have logic, ample precedents, everything else on my side, I might trounce her in the argument — but, in the end, when the dust has settled, it turns out she was right all along.

So Pam and I have worked out a compromise. I never wanted kids, she always wanted two, so we've decided on one. Two, you're a referee (three and you play zone, as one of my friends says), but one maybe I could handle. If not, I'm in big trouble. ◆

David Eddie's first novel Chump Change *will be published by Random House Canada in the fall of 1996.*

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Cutting Our Noses

Anita K. Blair explains why abolishing all-male schools will hurt women

Shannon Faulkner may have collapsed during her freshman week at the Citadel in Charleston, South Carolina, but the campaign to abolish same-sex schools has not. Some two hundred miles from the college whose admission policies Faulkner tried to bust, a more serious challenge is underway. On January 17, the Supreme Court will hear a case against the Virginia Military Institute that will decide the fate of same-sex public schools — and arguably same-sex private schools — across the nation.

If the Supreme Court holds that VMI must admit women, it won't just be boys who will lose out. All-female programs would be imperiled too. So it is particularly odd that national women's groups — from the National Organization for Women to the American Association of University Women — should be siding with the lawyers of the Department of Justice against VMI. In a cut-your-nose-to-spite-your-face gesture, these groups have joined the American Civil Liberties Union's *amicus* brief supporting the federal government, which argues that sex discrimination should be subject to "strict scrutiny" — the same legal standard by which race discrimination is judged.

But it is precisely these so-called advocates of women who should be most on the side of VMI — particularly if they believe, as they often say they do, that girls benefit from all-female education. How many girls don't raise their hands, or drop out of science classes, because they don't want the boys to think they're too smart? How many girls have to waste class time waiting for the teacher to finish disciplining rowdy boys? And why are the boys rowdy? Sociologists and psychologists tell us that adolescent girls and boys develop in different, almost opposite, directions. As they enter their teens, girls often lose confidence. Boys, on the other hand, become overly aggressive. Single-sex programs cater to the different needs of each group.

The founders of VMI recognized these differences in 1839. Yet far from being a throwback, an institution like VMI today may hold the key for helping us socialize and civilize young males, many of whom grow up without fathers. With its ancient honor system and old-fashioned ways of discipline, VMI's methods may help us learn again how to inculcate morality in our children. And in an age when computers threaten to replace teachers (and television has replaced parents), an institution like VMI may remind us that young people still need adults to teach them how to live.

Nor is it just state-funded schools that are in danger. If VMI loses, it will be very difficult for private schools to remain single sex too. Private schools rely heavily on direct and indirect funding from the government (in the forms of tax-deductible donations and federally subsidized student loans, among others). To qualify for these benefits, schools must certify that they follow nondiscriminatory policies. Currently, Title IX of the Civil Rights Act specifically permits single-sex schools. But if the Supreme Court accepts the Justice Department's arguments, the Title IX exemption for single-sex schools would probably soon be regarded as unconstitutional. In this case, single-sex schools will face three choices: go coed, eschew public support, or close their doors.

The adoption of the "strict scrutiny" standard in sex-discrimination cases, in place of the courts' previous "intermediate scrutiny" standard, is equivalent to a judicial adoption of the Equal Rights Amendment. We remember the rhetoric in the ERA debates of the 1970s and early '80s. At the time, many moderate observers dismissed the notion that the ERA could ever be used to sanction gay marriage — unaware that barely twenty years later, the supreme court and legislature of Hawaii would be poised to reach the same result. Enlightened people chuckled over Phyllis Schlafly's hyperbolic fears of unisex bathrooms — the sort that now prevail on many college campuses.

Grim experience leads one to conclude that, if the Supreme Court decides against VMI, the effects will be exactly what the old ERA opponents predicted. And toilets will be the least of our concerns. ◆

Anita K. Blair is executive vice president and general counsel of the Independent Women's Forum. She drafted the IWF's amicus *brief supporting VMI in the Supreme Court case now pending. She also serves on VMI's supervisory Board of Visitors.*

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The Weaker Sex

The Original Flower Child

John Muggeridge recalls his grandmother, who loved freely

"'It was all Mrs. Bumble. She *would* do it,' urged Mr. Bumble; first looking round to ascertain that his partner had left the room.

'That is no excuse,' replied Mr. Brownlow. 'You…indeed are the more guilty of the two, in the eye of the law; for the law supposes that your wife acts under your direction.'

'If the law supposes that,' said Mr. Bumble,… 'the law is a ass — a idiot. If that's the eye of the law, the law is a bachelor; and the worst I wish the law is, that his eye may be opened by experience — by experience.'"

Thus Oliver Twist's childhood tormentor puts paid to the idea of marriage as an instrument of male oppression. But is Mr. Bumble right? Does experience teach the idiocy of assuming that wives are directed by their husbands? Certainly husbands have always claimed that it did. Could anything be more Bumblesque, for example, than Adam's whining excuse: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat"? No doubt he waited to mutter this until Eve was safely out of earshot. Adam's conduct, of course, is indefensible. He disobeyed God and let down his wife. But this much can be said for him: the arena in which the battle between the sexes takes place has never been a level playing field. Marriage empowers women in ways that Mr. Brownlow, being a bachelor, could have no inkling of.

Consider my maternal grandmoth-

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er Rosalind Potter — the youngest sister of Beatrice Webb, founding mother of modern British socialism. Matrimony for Rosalind spelled independence. Once she'd graduated from spinsterhood, neither of her husbands, nor any member of her large and powerful family could exercise much control over her.

Born in 1865, the ninth and last daughter of a successful entrepreneur, Rosalind was the only authentic Victorian I ever got to know well — and of all the members of my family from that era, the least Victorian. Even in young girlhood, she defied convention. As part of the Potter sisters' education for life, each of them was expected to undertake a domestic duty. Eight-year-old Rosalind got the task of cleaning piano keys. The housekeeper provided her with half a pint of brandy to use as a solvent; she drank it.

Nor did the passage of time make her any less nonconformist. I remember her, in her late seventies, facing down British troops. This was in 1942. We lived at the time seven miles from Hastings, a resort town on England's south coast, some twenty miles across the Channel from occupied France. Granny was taking us children on an outing to the sea. Going anywhere with her was an unnerving experience. Her loud voice, unpredictable behavior, and bizarre costume — Edwardian hand-me-downs, originally designed for her sister Beatrice, and now worn by Rosalind inside out (my father claimed deliberately) — made us children long for a more conventional grandmother. We used to fight not to sit next to her on the bus.

There the four of us were, then, pretending as hard as we could to belong to someone else, while Granny explained in piercing tones to a nearby inoffensive serviceman the justice of Hitler's claim to the Polish Corridor. At that precise moment, the bus stopped at a military checkpoint. Armed soldiers boarded. This was always our worst moment. Granny carried pencil and sketch book, the manuscript of her autobiography, and five years' supply of hairpins, but never her identity card. Without daring to look round, we listened to the approaching tramp of boots and rustle of papers. Perhaps this time they really would haul her off to the Tower of London. But no. After what seemed eternity, the bell dinged, the bus moved on, and once more that dread voice reverberated through it: "Don't you see? Danzig is a German city, so of course Herr Hitler had to find a way of getting there."

Perhaps being the youngest in the family kept her the most feckless. For one thing, the family's economic anxieties did not impinge on her. Her father, Richard Potter, used to get his older daughters to help manage the family business; hence, they knew from personal experience how precarious nineteenth-century financial markets were. He himself had almost gone under in the crash of 1848, and only the ensuing railway boom saved him. Then that too exploded. Potter was chief shareholder and president of Canada's Grand Trunk Railway when it teetered on the verge of bankruptcy in the early 1860s. This time, British North American Union got him off the hook. But it was a close thing. For Potter it was always a close thing. He kept two large homes, one in Gloucestershire and the other in London. The last thing he wanted to be landed with in the next economic crisis however, was mortgaged real estate. They were rented.

One way of staving off disaster was to have the girls marry financial security. All of them did — except Rosalind. Her first husband was not her fault. An out-of-work lawyer and notorious rake who died of syphilis five years into their marriage, he had received the Potter sisters' seal of approval simply because they wanted him to take Rosalind off their hands. Beatrice considered him a "semi-criminal lunatic" but had no compunction about wishing him on Rosalind. The truth is that the sisterhood found its youngest member as much of a social liability as we children did.

But their stratagem backfired on them. They had expected matrimony to swallow Rosalind up. Instead, widowhood empowered her. Not only could she draw on an independent income, but thanks to her husband's death she was no longer encumbered by either chaperon or male protector — a merry widow indeed, whose comments at balls and dinner parties had long been making her sisters cringe with shame, now back in circu-

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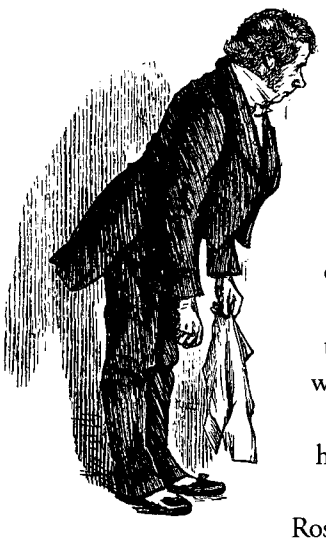
lation with a vengeance. At least we'd had the option of moving to the back of the bus.

Inevitably it was Beatrice the sisters turned to in this crisis. Beatrice was the Potter equivalent of Bismarck. Her father's stroke ten years earlier had put her in full control of his business interests. Nobody knew better than she how tenuous had been his hold on prosperity. And recently she'd had a brain wave: the solution to her family's problems was nonrevolutionary socialism. Why go putting yourself at the mercy of unrestrained capitalism when you could so easily abolish it? Rather than having to keep battening down the hatches, batten down the weather. Nor was there the slightest question in Beatrice's mind of dispossessing privilege. In the new world she envisaged, thanks to the dismantling of free enterprise, privilege would become unassailable; the haves would continue to have, while the disappearance of a free market would permanently prevent the have-nots from competing with them. Indeed, it was as a way of holding on to what her father had so hardly won that Beatrice joined the Fabian Society, married Sidney Webb, and helped set Britain on the road to welfare serfdom.



But first the Rosalind problem had to be dealt with. A new husband, this time a respectable well-heeled doctor, was tried out on her. Independence had stiffened Rosalind's resistance. She wouldn't have him. His touch, she told Beatrice, was physically repulsive to her. Another member of the sisterhood, Maggie — who herself had snagged a prosperous landowner — assured Rosalind that it would work out all right once they were married and that anyway, "one man was as good as another in that respect." But Rosalind stood her ground. "I felt instinctively," she wrote in her unpublished autobiography, "that for me at any rate this would not be the case." This was rank rebellion. Not only had she harbored an instinctive feeling; she had acted on it against the wishes of her sisters.

Now, to make matters worse, Rosalind left for the continent, accompanied only by her young son and a nurse. The following three years may have been the happiest in her life. During them she wandered about Europe indulging to the fullest her two favorite pastimes: painting sunsets and falling in love. She was in her late twenties, beautiful and husbandless. Moreover, it so happened that in those days the places where the sun set most dramatically were haunted every summer by trainloads of lonely, grand-touring Englishmen.

Rosalind's inter-matrimonial spree reached its high point in a hotel on the island of Capri. There she bribed the maitre d' to seat her at dinner beside the most handsome Englishman present, and duly she found herself being smiled upon by George Cumberland Dobbs, an Irishman with no capital, no employment, and no prospects, but more than enough charm to make up for all three deficiencies. As always with Rosalind, it was love at first sight (when it was not hate at first sight). Back in London, Dobbs crossed the carbolic curtain which kept her quarantined from the world while she was recovering from deadly scarlet fever. That did it. Hadn't he risked his life to be with her?

The sisters, of course, found nothing in G.C.D. to recommend him as a brother-in-law. They accepted Rosalind's engagement to him, however, mostly because of the troublesome stories which had got back to them about her recent adventures in Europe. Beatrice even wondered whether their youngest sister might not be pregnant. And certainly it could have been so. She had slept with Dobbs on Capri; having bid him a lover's farewell, she thought nothing of embarking on yet another affair, this time with the novelist George Gissing in Rome. She got to like Gissing very much. In fact, H.G. Wells, who was a friend of Gissing's, hoped that something might come of their relationship.

But you have to understand Rosalind. Not only did she believe in free love; she loved freely. Yet nobody would have called her easygoing. Hers was one of those houses where someone is always fighting about something. She

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throve on shouting matches. I remember once, when my mother was talking on the telephone to the butcher with more than usual animation, Granny emerged from her afternoon rest, the fire of battle in her eyes. And none of us will forget those ferocious tea time arguments she used to have with G.C.D. over what colors predominated in a Swiss sunset remembered from forty years before. Her amours, however, were a different matter. Them she conducted entirely without rancor. Others might feel guilt or jealousy on her account. She never did on theirs. My grandmother was a flower child with money.

The sisterhood had hoped that matrimony would put an end to Rosalind's flower-childing. But in Dobbs, they'd bought a bum steer. The time came for Bismarck to use iron and blood. This was the same Beatrice Webb, remember, who waited until the truth about Stalin's tyranny became irrefutable before turning the title of the second edition of her book in praise of Soviet Communism — *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization?* — from a question into a statement. The sisterhood convened a panel of medical specialists, who, after questioning Rosalind for an hour, pronounced her on the verge of insanity. The next day she got a letter from Beatrice saying (in Rosalind's words) "...if I did not take care I should find myself in a lunatic asylum and...both my children, Noel and Pat, would be taken away from me." Shades of the caring society.

But in the end, they didn't commit her. She promised Dobbs never to be unfaithful to him in the future. (Incidentally, she asked no such commitment of him when some years later he was the one who was straying.) What finally got them out of the sisterhood's hair was Dobbs' bankruptcy. He had used a large part of his wife's inheritance to launch a publishing business which quickly ended up in receivership. In those days that meant having to live abroad. The sisters paid off Dobbs' debts on condition he move his family to Switzerland. He got a job in the nascent tourist industry, booking hotel rooms and organizing mountain trips for the very same wandering Englishmen that Rosalind had been so romantically interested in five years earlier. As for Rosalind herself, she went back to painting sunsets; on one occasion, she refused to put down her brush even when a local peasant breathlessly announced that her youngest son, Bill, had fallen into Lake Geneva.

The final scene in this story unfolds on December 12, 1947, in Westminster Abbey. The Webbs are being buried there, the first married couple to be so honored in eight hundred years. It is a glittering occasion, attended by dignitaries from both Church and State. Prime Minister Clement Attlee (himself a Fabian) has spoken the eulogy. "Millions," he tells assembled mourners, "are living fuller and freer lives today because of the work of Sidney and Beatrice Webb." As the Dean supervises the lowering of these two bundles of socialist ashes into their last resting places, an old woman accosts him. She is wearing crumpled and outmodish clothes; her iron-gray bun, still streaked with black is, as always, on the point of collapse. In her most piercing stage whisper she demands to know: "Which is Sidney and which is Beatrice?"

In older and mellower days, Beatrice had admitted to my father that Rosalind had carried the day. "Rosie," she wrote in her diary in 1929, "has the last laugh on her prudish sisters. She shocked us with her free ways during her widowhood. Today her free ways are a la mode."

Rosalind, as the scene at Westminster Abbey makes clear, did indeed have the last laugh. But alas, her brand of uninhibited femininity is gone forever. Perhaps what did it in was the very sexual revolution that she herself had so accurately prefigured. Marriage and motherhood emancipated her; but the wives and mothers of the generation her great-granddaughter Rosalind (my daughter) belongs to are more likely to be pitied than stood in awe of. ◆

John Muggeridge, son of the late journalist Malcolm Muggeridge, is a retired professor who lives in Welland, Ontario, Canada.

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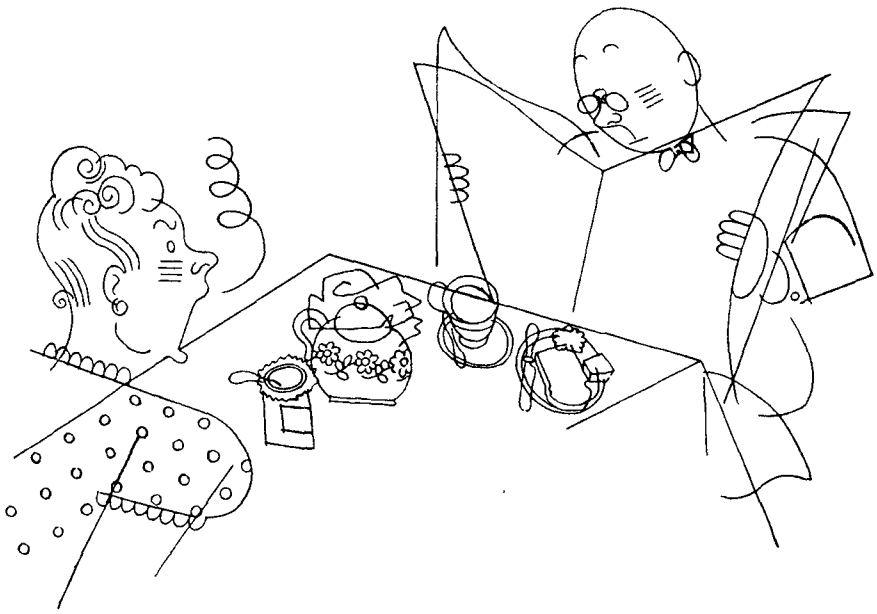
We Told You So

Nagging works! Henpecked husbands live longer than carefree bachelors, reports *William R. Mattox, Jr.*



Is a wife who nags better than no wife at all? A University of Chicago researcher believes so. Demographer Linda Waite has compiled a wide range of studies showing that married men typically live longer and enjoy significantly better health than unmarried men. Part of the reason for that, she says, is because "marriage provides individuals — especially men — with someone who monitors their health and health-related behaviors and who encourages self-regulation." In short, someone who nags them.

Waite's suggestion that a wife's nagging does a man good is every husband's worst nightmare. (That noise you hear is the sound of men climbing onto the corner of their roofs — the place King Solomon said he'd rather live than in a house with a quarrelsome woman.) Yet Waite insists her chief aim is not to encourage women to pester their husbands mercilessly but to heighten public awareness of research that shows married people live longer and enjoy better health. She thinks such findings need the same sort of attention that has been given research on the health consequences of behaviors like cigarette smoking and exercise — especially since it is increasingly clear that marriage affects health more than health affects marriage. In fact, Waite says that on average, a man's lifespan is shortened more by being unmarried than by being poor, overweight, or having heart disease.

For example, a recent research review by Robert Coombs of the University of California at Los Angeles shows that the link between marriage and long life is due more to the fact that marriage fosters good health than to the fact that healthy people are more likely to get and stay married. And Waite says there is some evidence that men who would otherwise be at higher risk for premature death are actually more likely than other men to marry and remain married.

Divorced men are particularly likely to experience health problems. When

"Mortimer, are you listening?" Cartoon by Ervine Metzl

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compared to married men, divorced males are twice as likely to die prematurely from hypertension, four times as likely to die prematurely from throat cancer, and seven times as likely to die prematurely from pneumonia. Divorced men also have significantly higher rates of depression, substance abuse, auto accidents, and suicide. "Being divorced and a non-smoker is only slightly less dangerous than smoking a pack or more a day and staying married," observes David Larson of the National Institute for Healthcare Research.

The research goes further to show that marriage benefits couples as a whole: married couples fare significantly better than couples living together outside of marriage. Indeed, Waite says married men and women each report significantly higher physical and emotional satisfaction with their sex lives than either single or cohabiting men and women. Washington State University researcher Jan Stets finds that women in cohabiting unions are more than twice as likely to be the victims of domestic violence as married women. And data from the National Institute of Mental Health shows that cohabiting women have rates of depression that are more than three times higher than married women and more than twice that of other never-married women.

Clearly, cohabitation does not offer the same benefits that marriage provides; in large part because the absence of a permanent commitment hinders the development of certain qualities — like self-sacrifice, empathy, and trust — that are critical to the success of an intimate union.

Why does marriage offer men such extraordinary health benefits? Waite says marriage gives men a sense of obligation to others, which discourages them from high-risk behaviors (like driving too fast and drinking too much) and encourages them to make and save more money (which can be used to buy better health care and live in safer surroundings, among other things). In addition, marriage offers them a network of help and support, which can be particularly beneficial in dealing with stress and in recovering from illnesses and accidents.

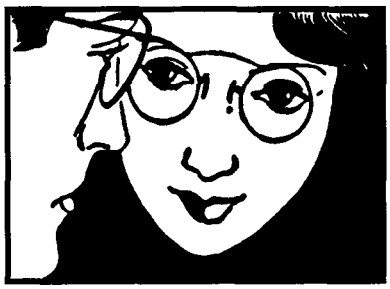
As with all research of this kind, it is important to recognize that these findings reflect averages. They in no way suggest that every unmarried person is doomed to bad health or that getting married gives one immunity from the negative consequences of, say, eating pork rinds.

But the research does lend credence to the observation in Ecclesiastes that, "Two are better than one, because. . . . if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow. . . . " Or nag him to get up. ◆

William R. Mattox, Jr. is vice president for policy at the Family Research Council in Washington, D.C.

So Who's Really Paying the Bills Around Here?

According to Paul Sheldon of Prudential Securities, it's women. Mr. Sheldon, who operates a seminar program entitled "Women and Their Money," reports the following:



- Sixty-one percent of family bills are paid by women.
- Fifty-three percent of all shareholders are women.
- Eighty percent of all checks are written by women.
- And eighty-six percent of the personal wealth of the United States is controlled by women.

Mr. Sheldon explains that last startling statistic by the fact that seventy-five percent of women outlive their husbands; the rise in single-parent families headed by women; and that in two-career households, decision-making of family finances and investments is increasingly falling to women.

Mr. Sheldon also notes that women are statistically more successful investors than men. "Actually," he says, "men and women are equal in selecting winning and losing investment situations. The difference becomes apparent when your selection starts declining. Women more readily admit their mistakes and will exit with a modest loss. Men are stubborn and will ride their selection all the way down to the bottom, never conceding their error in judgment." ◆

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Review

Silly Novels by Lady Novelists

Stephanie Herman surveys feminist pulp fiction

Just when it seemed the Lifetime channel had exploited the last iota of public interest in the Betty Broderick story — the California woman who made headlines in 1989 when she murdered her ex-husband and his new wife — novelist Marge Piercy decided to strike.

Cleverly capitalizing on the Broderick alliteration, and borrowing heavily from the Pamela Smart story (the New Hampshire school teacher who convinced her student lover to murder her husband), Piercy reincarnated the feminist nonpareil of husband killers in Becky Burgess, the heroine of her 1994 novel, *The Longings of Women*. Unlike Broderick, though, Burgess kills her husband because he is abusive and, beyond that, she wants to keep their condo. She justifies his murder with the highest moral reasoning available to a feminist heroine: her husband's death is essential to her own survival. Writes Piercy: "No, what mattered was the threat to her *survival*. She was not moving back home. . . . She'd see him dead first." (Italics mine.)

This pretext of surviving in a man's world is as essential to the modern feminist plotline as living happily ever after is to a Harlequin romance. Feminist survival, however, does not entail an individual's heroic transcendence of some obstacle — i.e., something that might make for good reading. It involves simply and ineffectual-

Cartoons by Charles Jaffé

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ly getting through it or existing despite it — *it* being abortion, a bad marriage, death, life — with nothing revealed, nothing learned, nothing eclipsed.

Although feminism as an institution was supposedly concerned with women's freedom to act, feminist authors have continually placed their female protagonists in situations where outside forces act upon them. Throughout the subsequent process of enduring these injustices (be they sexual harassment, spousal infidelity, or a prosecuting attorney in a husband-murder trial) feminist heroines have been almost universally exempt from fiction's foremost rule: that the main character should learn, grow, or change by the end of the story. Even in the world of literature, it seems, feminists argue for special dispensation.

Unfortunately, they're getting it. The last twenty-five years has seen the frenzied creation of a new genre of women's literature — feminist pulp fiction. If an aspiring woman writer boasts three polysyllabic names, can pepper the angry dialogue of her heroine with capital letters and exclamation points, and remembers to include the word clitoris somewhere in the manuscript, she's as good as published.

This is nothing new. George Eliot (Marian Evans) noticed that creatively impoverished novels churned out by Victorian women were eagerly bought up by publishing houses convinced that women readers were not only fiercely loyal to their sex, but apparently indiscriminate as well. The result of this observation was the 1856 publication of George Eliot's rarely cited essay, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," in the *Westminster Review.* According to Eliot biographer Gordon Haight, one "species of silly novel [was] the 'oracular,' in which the writer's religious, philosophical, or moral theories [were] expounded." Today, the oracular novel has metamorphosed into the supermarket romance look-alike, expounding the liberating ecstasy, not to mention the moral necessity, of breaking patriarchal rules. Such novels generally depict an unfaithful husband, a few sullen teenage children, and a mother cast in the role of victim, armed only with a high-limit credit card and a contemptuous gaze.

Though first-year English majors can easily recognize such a character as flat, the critics somehow fail to notice. Instead, praise is lavished upon any female author attempting to tackle a politically correct issue (a phenomenon also noted by George Eliot, as critics of her time proffered the "choicest phraseology of puffery" when reviewing the above-mentioned silly novels). Critic William Smart, for example, describes Charlotte Douglas, the protagonist of Joan Didion's *A Book of Common Prayer* (1977) as "shallow, foolish, weak," but eventually elevates the character to the status of "a hero of sorts: she *survives.*" (Italics mine.)

Likewise, college English students using *The Norton Anthology of English*

Literature as a critical text are taught to appreciate James Joyce for Gabriel's transformation in *The Dead* from "possessiveness and egotism" to "artistic awareness," but to appreciate another Irish novelist, Edna O'Brien, for "her depiction — in a style as simple as Joyce's is complex — of women as sufferers and *survivors.*" (Italics mine.) Male characters are expected to improve, while their female counterparts are allowed to remain passively quiescent. Admittedly, these inert characters do survive — much as a slouching student in a back-row desk survives first period without being asked for the correct answer.

In Ellen Gilchrist's 1992 novel *Net of Jewels,* the protagonist, Rhoda Manning, is a passionate young alcoholic, long suffering under the roof of her wealthy, domineering father. Among his other sins, he shields Rhoda from the consequences of her own mistakes — including a drunken car crash resulting in a death, a baseless marriage, the constant neglect of her children, and her self-centered, albeit peripheral, involvement in the suicide of her maid. It's not surprising that Rhoda — described on the book's cover as "irrepressible and headstrong" — would

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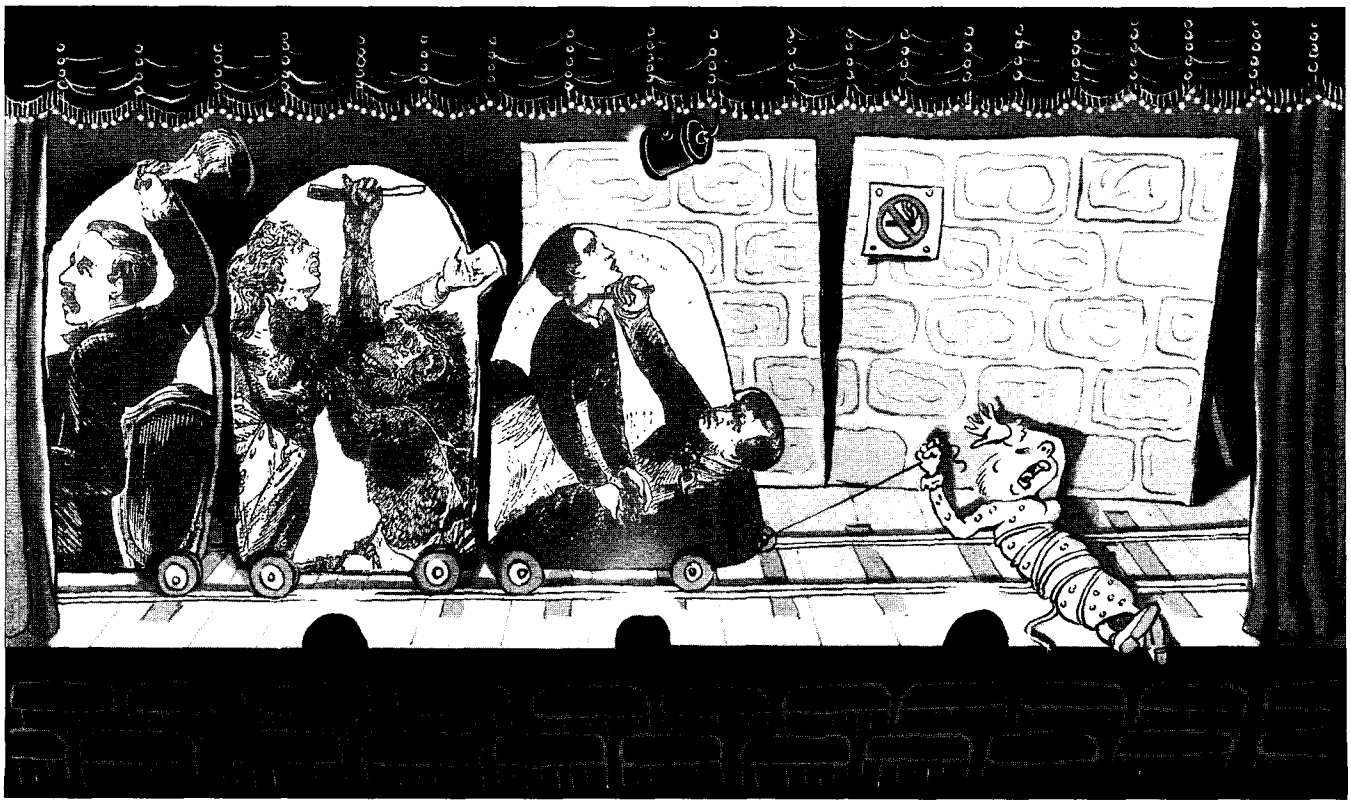
innocently wonder, "Who [meaning God] would hold something that they made responsible for itself?" Certainly this philosophical question liberates Gilchrist from any effort to make her character interesting. Rhoda, who essentially complains for 350 pages, bemoaning the nuisance of having to watch her liquor and the onus of an autocratic father, fails to grow or change by the end of the story.

"In the novel," wrote D.H. Lawrence in *Why the Novel Matters*, "the characters can do nothing but live. If they keep on being good, according to pattern, or bad, according to pattern, or even volatile, according to pattern, they cease to live, and the novel falls dead." In browsing through the shelves of feminist fiction, the novels fall dead, again and again. Where is the individual striving toward moral purpose? Where is Fitzgerald's Gatsby, staring at the green light across the lake? Where is McCullers' Frankie, glimpsing the incarnation of freedom from the corner of her eye? Where is Bellow's Henderson, chanting to himself, "I want, I want"? The individual holds no place of honor in this genre of fiction. To a liberal-minded feminist of letters, the plight of the individual is archaically conservative, a bit too Ayn Rand, and, of course, yawningly conventional.

Still, feminist authors don't avoid conventionality simply for the sake of blazing new literary trails. Any writer worth her printer ribbon has read T.S. Eliot's essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," and comprehends his claim that while new forms and contents continually emerge, "art never improves." No, conventionality is instead shunned by the feminist literati for the paranoid linkage made between anything traditional and the omnipotent patriarchy. After all, when setting down those six antiquated components of good Greek tragedy in his *Poetics*, Aristotle did make the following claim regarding character portrayal: "Even a woman may be good... though the woman may be said to be an inferior being."

In response, female authors are said to be "in revolt." Feminist literary critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, co-authors of *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, claim that most female writers, in reaction to the patriarchal canon of literature, are subsequent victims of what they term the "affiliation complex." Three stages mark an author's transformation: the female writer acknowledges the paternal history of literature, she retaliates with a "renunciation of (aesthetic) desire," and finally adopts a female muse.

Unfortunately, politically inspired muses and the epics they engender



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address not human dilemmas but societal ones. Patriarchal society, in the role of antagonist, becomes the focus of the feminist novel and it is this society, not the individual, that is expected to change. In this sense, society becomes both antagonist and protagonist.

Marilyn French, a truly vapid writer with the irritating habit of randomly displacing her narrative point of view, has epitomized the use of society as protagonist/antagonist. In her most recent novel, *Our Father* (1994), four sisters share the role of protagonist. They represent not four individual women, however, but four facets of Womanhood: Ronnie, the lesbian/outcast; Alex, the nurturer/airhead; Mary, the beauty/whore; and Elizabeth, the intellectual/bitch. As a group, the sisters serve as a metaphor of the society of women, born of the evil (and yes, Republican) father figure of the patriarchy.

For the first third of the novel, the sisters lounge around their father's mansion, lighting cigarettes and glaring through swirls of smoke, and referring to one another as "cow," "bitch," or, in more serene moments, "hypocrite." In French's most simplistic and egregious metaphor, this reciprocal hatred represents the lack of unity among women in general. The significant change these sisters undergo is that old Movie-of-the-Week standby: by the end of the novel, they have learned to love and understand each other despite their differences. The unity of women is thus restored and harmony is achieved in the house of the odious patriarch.

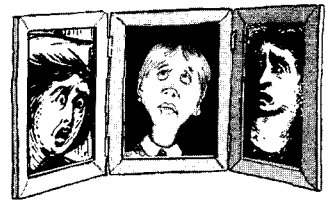
What about those female characters who eclipse the sin of flatness by exhibiting evil? Margaret Atwood, at least, had the courage to admit that women are capable of evil. In fact, her depiction of the ruthless Zenia in *The Robber Bride* (1993) earned severe reproach from her own feminist sisters for casting such a disparaging light on a fellow, though fictitious, female. But is Atwood guilty of this whiny charge?

The Robber Bride is, again, a story of survival: three women (Tony, Charis and Roz) survive a brutal war with Zenia, a woman who goes after their money, their men, and finally, their admiration. The women don't actually win the war, they — you guessed it — survive it; and they do so — you guessed it again — by remaining passive and refusing to participate: "they were tempted, each one of them, but they didn't succumb. Succumbing would have been killing Zenia...and [that] would have meant turning into Zenia." Which, it turns out, is the real temptation — to become Zenia, a character possessing great physical beauty, wolf-like cunning, and complete power over men.

When Zenia finally dies, Tony, Charis, and Roz relinquish their intense fear of her, replacing it with an almost equally intense respect. Her threat now passed, Zenia's memory serves as an icon of the Powerful, Mysterious Woman. They dutifully arrange her funeral, dispose of her ashes, and fail to fully comprehend the many good reasons why nobody else showed up. Tony ponders Zenia's enigmatic life: "What she is remembering is Zenia. She owes her this remembrance." Why? And in suggesting Tony's debt to the memory of Zenia, what exactly is Atwood saying about evil women?

Surprisingly, Atwood delivers much the same message as her literary inferior, Marge Piercy. Both justify feminine evil as just another survival tactic, elevating evil women to a new level of respect. "Courageous" Zenia, "headstrong" Rhoda, even this tribute to Becky Burgess by Piercy: "For being a wife who had used up her husband with no more regard or remorse than men frequently showed toward women, she had removed herself from the circle of women into infamy." So, too, at the close of Atwood's novel, Tony thinks again of her nemesis, Zenia, and wistfully wonders, "Are we in any way like her?"

What Tony overlooks in her quiet moment of repose is that in dying, Zenia breaks the cardinal rule of the feminist heroine: she forgets to survive. ◆



Stephanie Herman lives in Denver.

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2111 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 550, Arlington, Virginia 22201-3057, or fax them to 703/243-9230.

Protection for rapists

Re: Helen Mathews Smith's article on AIDS testing ("Are We Nuts?"; Autumn 1995 issue). New York State's new law on HIV testing of sex offenders allows rape victims to learn the HIV status of their attackers within ten days of conviction. Long overdue, the legislation affords rape victims the opportunity to know whether or not they've been exposed to the deadly disease. However, the criminal justice system still often regards the privacy rights of sex offenders as a priority. The new law exhibits several important limitations that should be corrected.

First, rape victims must wait until *after* conviction to learn the offender's HIV status. Since trials are often lengthy and guilty pleas often deferred, the delay can mean years of waiting. Second, since a guilty verdict is required, the victim cannot learn the HIV status of any offender who is acquitted. Third, in cases of multiple rape, not all victims are permitted to learn the HIV status of the attacker. Last, a rape victim who learns of exposure to HIV cannot sue the offender for damages. Predator rapists who knowingly expose victims to deadly HIV could and should be charged with attempted murder; instead they are fully protected. Surely those exposed should at least be able to hold their attackers accountable for damages.

In 1994, the National Organization for Women held a rally in Washington, D.C., at which they proclaimed themselves the champion fighters against crime against women — including rape. At the same time, NOW forged a political alliance with the Gay Men's Health Crisis Center,

the American Civil Liberties Union, and the National Abortion Rights Action League to mount a campaign to block all testing of sex offenders for HIV. The alliance succeeded in killing a federal requirement for HIV testing of sex offenders in an anti-crime bill. Simultaneously, the New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault, along with other groups across the country, took the ridiculous position that notifying a rape victim of the attacker's HIV status could be harmful to the victim's emotional well-being. The so-called experts paraded by these groups got away with their shameful misrepresentations.

Victims need legal protection, they need legal redress, and they must have the right to know whether their attackers have transmitted any disease to them.

DEIDRE RAVER
Co-President
Women Against Violence
Brooklyn, New York

No interest in the national interest

I enjoyed Cynthia Grenier's article on magazines such as *Glamour* and *Cosmopolitan* in the Summer 1995 issue. In a local library I recently tried to obtain the issue of the *American Scholar* that includes Daniel Patrick Moynihan's often quoted article "Defining Deviancy Down." The library does not subscribe to the *American Scholar*, the *Public Interest* or the *National Interest*, but it does subscribe to *Cosmopolitan.*

ERIC H. SILVERMAN
Highland Park, New Jersey

One man, no mandate

The misgivings expressed by Anita Blair, executive vice president of the Independent Women's Forum, on the "MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour" about the Beijing conference on women prompts the thought that your readers may be interested in an official statement issued by Sharon Hayes, a parliamentary observer on the Canadian delegation: "At this Fourth World Conference on Women, the Canadian delegation is presenting a one-sided gender feminist agenda resting mainly on the notion of 'gender equality.' I submit to you that this agenda is unresponsive to the real challenges faced by women worldwide and unreflective of the priorities of the majority of Canadians. What was the process that made it possible? Were Canadians consulted or even aware of the agenda?.... I have serious questions about the mandate of our delegation. We state our first priority as equality. Why then is there only one man among forty? We state our second priority as diversity. Why then is there no room for input or movement in our position? How and why were our delegates funded and NGOs chosen?"

M. JEAN DUFF
Willowdale, Ontario, Canada

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Continued from page 1

choice Democrats, including House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt and former Commerce committee chairman John Dingell, joined Republicans in voting for the ban.

Even the Supreme Court speaks a little more diffidently on the subject of abortion. In a 1989 case, *Webster v. Director of Reproductive Health Services*, and its 1992 decision in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, the Court permitted states to limit abortion rights, especially those of minors, without fear of falling foul of the Fourteenth Amendment. Indeed, the Supreme Court seems to be continuing to uphold *Roe v. Wade* less because it believes that decision to have been correct than because it fears damaging its own authority by conceding that the decision was mistaken.

What happened? How did the pro-choice side lose its way?

THE ANSWER COULDN'T be simpler. Proponents of abortion rights overcame Americans' qualms about the procedure with a long series of claims about the benefits of unrestricted abortion on demand. Without exception, those claims have proven false.

Perhaps the most powerful of the pro-choice arguments was the claim that any infringement of the right to an abortion would return America to the dark ages when thousands of women died because of unsafe, back-alley abortions—between five thousand and ten thousand a year was the figure usually given by abortion proponents in the 1970s. In fact, it wasn't *Roe v. Wade* that made abortion safe: it was the availability of antibiotics beginning in the 1940s. And at no time could the number of abortion fatalities ever have come anywhere close to the five thousand to ten thousand number.

The National Center for Health Statistics confirms that 1,313 women died obtaining illegal abortions in 1940, most of them victims of infection. But as penicillin and sulfa drugs spread — and as medical techniques improved — abortion-related deaths fell off sharply: only 159 in 1966, forty-one in 1972.

Had pre-*Roe* abortions been so very dangerous, we would have expected a sharp drop-off in the death rate among women after *Roe*. But Centers for Disease Control statistics show no decline in the years after *Roe* in the death rate of women aged fifteen to thirty-four, the group of women who account for ninety-four percent of all abortions.

Nor were the abortionists of the 1950s and 1960s the untrained butchers of legend: Dr. Mary Calderone, a former medical director for Planned Parenthood, estimated (in the *American Journal of Public Health*) in 1960 that ninety percent of all illegal abortions were performed by qualified physicians.

Another persuasive argument put forth by abortion advocates was that by guaranteeing that every child was a wanted child, legal abortion would protect children from being born into poverty, reduce illegitimacy rates, and help to eliminate the horrors of child abuse. That argument too has been spectacularly falsified.

Child poverty? Abortion advocates like Senator Jacob Javits of New York darkly suggested in the 1970s that America could get rid of poverty by getting rid of the poor. He described New York's decision to legalize abortion as "a significant step forward in dealing with the human problems of our state."

The Commission on Population Growth established by President Nixon in 1970 agreed. In the second of its three reports, issued in March 1972, it called for Medicaid-funded abortions as necessary weapons in the war on poverty: "Unwanted fertility is highest among those whose levels of education and income are lowest...."

But in fact child poverty rates have multiplied since then; the hope that America could abort poverty out of existence has not been borne out.

The commission also predicted that the legalization of abortion would reduce illegitimacy rates. That proved staggeringly incorrect. Only 10.7 percent of all births were to unmarried mothers in 1970. By 1975, after *Roe*, the illegitimacy rate had jumped to 14.3 percent. It now stands at twenty-six percent. Two-thirds of all black children are born out of wedlock.

Predictions of the alleviation of child abuse have proven no more accurate. The National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect reported 669,000 incidents of abuse in 1976 (the first year for which it has data) and three million incidents of abuse in 1994.

THERE WAS PROBABLY something disingenuous even at the time in abortion advocates' concern for children. Far more sincere — and passionate — was their argument that untrammelled abortion rights were indispensable to women's equality. In the early 1970s, abortion advocacy groups, such as the National Organization for Women, the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (later the National Abortion Rights Action League), and the President's Advisory Council on

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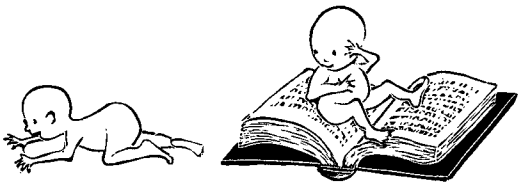
the Status of Women, insisted that any limit on abortion violated a woman's right to control her body.

Feminist author Shana Alexander expressed this point of view forcefully in an article in the October 2, 1972 *Newsweek*. She praised the demise of "Victorian sexual hypocrisy," and divided women into three categories: the most enlightened, who were now "legally able to terminate unwanted pregnancies"; the semi-enlightened, whose divorces had helped them to "gain a new understanding of their property rights and the fact that, through the very act of marriage, they surrendered certain of their fundamental human rights, including even their name"; and, most backward of all, "the so-called happily married women" who failed to recognize their oppression.

Feminist advocacy of abortion was powerfully seconded by the terror incited by Stanford biologist Paul Ehrlich's bestselling book, *The Population Bomb*, published in 1968. All ocean life would die of DDT poisoning by 1979, Ehrlich warned. Nor would Americans be spared. Thousands would die in smog disasters in New York and Los Angeles. Life expectancy in the United States would plunge to just forty-two years by 1980, as pollution-induced cancer epidemics ravaged the population.

Ehrlich co-founded the group Zero Population Growth to save the world from such destruction. To the public, the forecasts of this scientist, reported and amplified in the media, seemed appallingly plausible. By 1971, the number of children desired by young married women had dropped to an average of 2.4, just shy of Zero Population Growth's recommended 2.1. The United States birthrate tumbled from its postwar highs, and population experts credited the new environmental ideology as a factor in the decline. Press reports told of earnest young college girls having themselves surgically sterilized rather than bring any more children into an overcrowded world. In a controversial two-part



episode of the popular CBS sitcom "Maude" broadcast in 1972, the title character chose to have an abortion to end an unplanned pregnancy: a *New York Times* reporter intimated that the show was prompted by a $5,000 prize offered by the Population Institute for the best prime time script concerning population control.

Paul Ehrlich looks pretty silly now. Life expectancies in both the United States and the Third World are lengthening. Western European countries fret over birthrates below replacement levels, and birthrates in Africa, Asia, and Latin America have been falling for twenty-five years. Economic growth has brought creature comforts and better health to an increasing fraction of the human population everywhere on the planet.

Perhaps the last of the abortion myths to tumble is the familiar refrain that abortion ought to be a matter between a woman and her doctor. More and more, abortion is a matter between a woman and a specialized abortion clinic that offers little support or counseling. Two-thirds of the obstetricians and gynecologists in practice in the United States refuse to perform abortions, according to a survey released by the Kaiser Family Foundation in September 1995. The reasons given by these doctors only rarely included pressure from anti-abortion activists. Most doctors cited religious scruples, or simply said they did not like doing them.

The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology found the same levels of reluctance in a similar study done in 1985. The college found that even of the one-third of obstetricians and gynecologists who perform abortions, most do four or fewer per month. A majority of the 1.5 million abortions in the United States each year are done by just two percent of all obstetricians and gynecologists.

Pro-choice groups now pin their hopes on RU-486 and other abortion-inducing drugs as a way of bypassing the need for physicians. But this type of abortion, in which the dead fetus may be passed in the toilet or shower, may be even more emotionally traumatic for women than current procedures. It certainly does nothing to reassure the public that abortion is humane.

Instead, abortion, in the public mind, has become linked to sexual irresponsibility and the degradation of sound values and human life. Women may be free from "forced" childbearing, but increasing numbers of them are bearing and rearing their children alone. And, contrary to pro-choice assertions, figures from the Centers for Disease Control show that many of those having abortions are using the procedure as a form of birth control: of those who opted for abortion last year, nearly half had had at least one previous abortion. Nearly one in five had had two or more previous abortions.

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Further, that the nation should aim, as the Commission on Population Growth recommended in 1972, "toward the development of a basic ethical principle that only wanted children are brought into the world" is disturbing philosophically. Should a human being's right to existence depend solely on how much it is desired by another? Does support for abortion on demand lead us toward eliminating all of the unwanted, those whose suffering, or potential suffering, we decide is too much for them (or us) to bear?

A September 1995 Gallup poll shows the United States divided between those who take the more liberal view that abortion should be legal in "any" or "most" circumstances (forty-five percent) and those who take the more conservative view that it should be illegal or legal only in extreme circumstances, i.e., rape, incest, or fetal deformity (fifty-one percent). But single-issue surveys are meaningless in gauging whether support for abortion is a voting issue. Increasingly, Americans say they are personally opposed to abortion, yet favor the availability of legal abortion for someone else. That kind of soft support is vulnerable to erosion in the face of pitched congressional battles over gruesome medical procedures.

WE ARE NOW in an election year in which the much-maligned Catholics — one-quarter of the U.S. electorate — have been identified as the swing vote between solidly Democratic blacks and Jews and solidly Republican evangelical Protestants. Abortion-rights advocates (with whom I sympathize) should take heed. The debate over partial-birth abortions — a procedure in which the physician partly delivers the fetus, feet first, then kills it by piercing its skull with scissors, attaching a high-powered suction device and sucking out its brain — revealed not only a disturbing brutality toward the unborn, but also the prevalence of second- and third-trimester abortions. If abortion advocates remain rigid ideologues, unwilling to consider even the slightest restriction on a woman's right to choose, it could be a tough year for them at the polls. ◆

Candace C. Crandall, former communications director at The Center for Strategic & International Studies in Washington, D.C., now writes for the Science & Environmental Policy Project *in Fairfax, Virginia.*

THE PERSONAL IS LUCRATIVE, TOO

IN RESPONSE TO Naomi Wolf's about-face on abortion in the *New Republic*, Anne Applebaum wrote the following in the British *Spectator*: "It does have to be said that this particular twist in Ms. Wolf's political opinions was fully predictable. Her first book, *The Beauty Myth*, was a soul-searching investigation into the many ways in which the cosmetic industry oppresses young women into thinking that they need to be thin in order to be attractive. Since thinness was obviously of great concern to the somewhat plump, but nevertheless attractive, young Naomi Wolf, it is easy to see where she got the idea.

"Her second book, *Fire with Fire*, was dubbed by critics as a seminal work of the new 'power feminist' movement. In fact, it was a soul-searching investigation of the difficulties inherent in being a woman who earns a lot of money — from writing seminal power-feminist books, for example.... Now Ms. Wolf is pregnant and thus has moved on to the subjects of abortion and children, carrying the 'personal is political' one step futher: in the next decade, we can expect works on divorce (if she has one), the importance of marriage (if she does not), or perhaps soul-searching investigations into the many ways in which the cosmetics industry oppresses older women into thinking they need to look young in order to be attractive. Finally, we can expect — as we have come to expect from older feminists — a book on menopause. After all, Germaine Greer has written one too." ◆

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One last observation . . .

"Medicaid Paid for My Sex Change Operation"

Deborah Weiss encounters a new definition of paternity

I WAS PROSECUTING a paternity case on behalf of the welfare department to determine who was the father of an illegitimate child. The department was seeking child support. The court officer called in "John Smith." A beautiful, big-busted woman approached the stand. She had long blonde hair, smooth skin, and was wearing a low-cut blouse.

"Are you John Smith?" the court officer asked.

"Yes."

Everyone in the courthouse just looked at each other; it was business as usual in Manhattan's Family Court.

I cleared my throat and began my case: "Are you the father of this child?"

"Yes," John Smith stated in a manly voice. "I am."

The respondent then explained that "she" was in the process of a transsexual operation. "She'd" had all her injections, the required amount of psychotherapy, and evidently was just awaiting the final surgery to be performed. The hearing examiner ruled that John Smith was the child's father based on his/her own admission, and tried to continue the hearing without using any pronouns.

We proceeded to the matter of child support.

"Mr. Smith?" I asked. "Can you contribute twenty-five dollars per month to assist the welfare department in supporting your child?"

"I can't."

"But Mr. Smith," I said, "twenty-five dollars per month is less than one dollar per day — just a token gesture, really. Besides, how can you say you don't have any money for child support when you are paying for a transsexual operation?"

"Oh no," Mr. Smith answered with surprise. "I'm receiving this operation for free."

"For free? You found a doctor to work for *free*?"

"No, no, " Mr. Smith explained. "Medicaid is paying for it."

Medicaid?! I looked around the courtroom. No one blinked.

After the case came to a close, I rushed to my office to inquire about what I had just learned. "Could it possibly be true that Medicaid pays for transsexual operations?" I asked one of my attorney colleagues.

"Oh, that," she said, shrugging. "Medicaid pays for a transsexual operation whenever it is deemed to be 'medically necessary.' I had a case like that a few years ago." She referred me to the statute. "Just make sure you note in the file that the father is a woman. Otherwise he might appeal the case down the road. When the judge sees a woman walk in, who you say is named John and is the father of the child, the judge will just assume you confused some social security numbers and reverse the ruling."

Don't be so judgmental, a supervisor later scolded me when I told him about the case. The poor thing is really a woman trapped inside a man's body, he said, and very depressed about it. He looked at me sternly.

Walking back to my office, I recalled a "Saturday Night Live" sketch in which a physician tells a Chinese patient with an Italian accent that he's really an Italian trapped inside a Chinese body and needs a "transracial" operation. I wondered if Medicaid would cover that too. ◆

Deborah Weiss is an attorney formerly with the Department of Social Services in New York City. The name of the respondent and some details have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the case.

Drawing by Yuri Kolyadenko

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"Impressively accomplished"

–*the* Washington Post*'s Megan Rosenfeld on the IWF*

For the past three years, the Independent Women's Forum has been taking on the old establishment of feminist organizations — and winning. "The IWF has a profile almost unheard of for a group that is the new kid on the block," writes the *Boston Globe*. "In the marketplace of ideas, from the national news media all the way down to local radio, the IWF has shown its real strength.... [The] IWF is well on its way to becoming the foremost media nemesis of the feminist movement."

Why has the IWF been so successful? Because the women who make up the IWF are not radical ideologues — they're businesswomen, economists, lawyers, truck drivers, and also mothers. Because the IWF promotes individual responsibility, strong families, limited government, and opportunity — policies that help *all* Americans. Because the IWF, a non-partisan, non-profit Washington-based organization, sponsors speaker events and conferences noted for their provocative and free-ranging debates. And because the IWF publishes *The Women's Quarterly* — an intellectual antidote to *Ms.* — which syndicated columnist Mona Charen praises as, "My type of women's magazine! With humor and sarcasm but also with warmth and passion, these women offer an intelligent refutation of the leading feminist nonsense that is swallowed so uncritically by the mainstream press."

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